

Danuta Okoń

## SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS ET SENATORES ONCE AGAIN. A DEBATE WITH CESARE LETTA

The article controverts Cesare Letta's lecture given on the 19th International Epigraphic Congress (Rome 2014) and published later that year in the post-conference proceedings (C. Letta, *Settimo Severo e il senato // Epigrafia e ordine senatorio, 30 anni dopo*, Roma. 2014, pp. 127–141).

C. Letta claims (and I disagree with him) that the upper limit of senators in the Severan era is 600. He rejects *Historia Augusta* with its list of condemned senators mentioned by name at the same time including anonymous ones known from other sources (such as Herodian, Cassius Dio, epigraphy) thus establishing the number of senators repressed by Septimius Severus at 111.

On the basis of my research I conclude that the limit of senators amounts to 900–1000 people, the list of the repressed (only the ones known by name) amounts to 55 people, that is 5 % of the senate's makeup. I ascertain the aforementioned figures (as regards the scope of repressions) are minimum values, however, contrary to C. Letta's calculations, mine are based on substantive personal data.

I concur with Cesare Letta that Africans had strong position in senate of the Roman Empire in the Antonine as well as in the Severan era. According to my research, they constituted a bit more than 20 % of all senators in the Severan period. Nevertheless, I uphold my opinion of a significant role of Africans being in the very close circles of Septimius Severus — they constituted 40 % of the senators there. These values (20 % and 40 %) are very meaningful and they represent the role of Severus's kin in the ruling elite well. Therefore, I can not agree with Cesare Letta that the issue of *origo* in Septimius Severus's personal policy can be marginalized. Refs 14.

*Keywords:* Septimius Severus, senate, repressions.

Данута Оконь

## ЕЩЕ РАЗ О СЕПТИМИИ СЕВЕРЕ И СЕНАТОРАХ. ПОЛЕМИКА С ЧЕЗАРЕ ЛЕТТА

Статья представляет собой полемику с положениями доклада Чезаре Летта, сделанного на 19-м международном эпиграфическом конгрессе (Рим, 2014) и опубликованного позже в этом же году в материалах конференции<sup>1</sup>.

Ч. Летта утверждает (автор статьи выражает несогласие с ним), что верхним пределом численности сенаторов в эпоху Северов было 600 человек. Он отвергает сообщение *Historia Augusta*, где дан список приговоренных сенаторов, названных по именам, а также других источников (таких как Геродиан, Кассий Дион, эпиграфические памятники), в которых упоминаются не названные по именам репрессированные лица; таким образом получено число в 111 сенаторов, репрессированных Септимием Севером.

На основе своего исследования автор статьи делает заключение, что наибольшая численность сенаторов составляла 900–1000 человек. Число репрессированных (только известных по именам) составляло 55 человек, т. е. 5 % от общего числа сенаторов. Автор статьи считает вышеупомянутые цифры (в отношении числа репрессированных) минимальными, однако, в отличие от мнения Ч. Летта, эти расчеты базируются на основательных персональных данных. Автор статьи согласна с Ч. Летта в том, что выходцы из африканских провинций имели сильные позиции в сенате Римской империи в эпоху Антонинов, также как и в эпоху Северов.

---

Okoń Danuta — Associate Professor, Doctor Habil., Institute of Ancient History, Szczecin University, Krakowska Street 71-79, 71-004 Szczecin; danuta.okon@wp.pl

Оконь Данута — профессор, доктор наук, Институт древней истории, Университет г. Щецин, ул. Краковская, 71-79, 71-004 Щецин, Польша; danuta.okon@wp.pl

<sup>1</sup> C. Letta, *Settimio Severo e il senato // Epigrafia e ordine senatorio, 30 anni dopo*. Rome. 2014. pp. 127–141.

© Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, 2016

В соответствии с исследованием автора статьи они составляли немногим более 20 % от общего числа сенаторов при Северах. Тем не менее автор настаивает на своем мнении о значительной роли выходцев из африканских провинций, входивших в ближайшее окружение Септимия Севера, — они составляли 40 % сенаторов. Эти цифры (20 % и 40 %) имеют очень большое значение, и они хорошо представляют роль родственников Септимия Севера в составе правящей элиты. Поэтому автор статьи не может согласиться с Чезаре Летта в том, что вопрос о происхождении сенаторов в личной политике Септимия Севера неважен. Библиогр. 14 назв.

*Ключевые слова:* Септимий Север, сенат, усмирение.

The appraisal of imperial repressions against senators, which tended to be particularly harsh under emperors who ascended to power through civil war or confronted strong internal opposition has provoked spark lively debates, both among ancient as well as contemporary historians. In his paper delivered at the 19<sup>th</sup> International Epigraphic Congress and in the subsequent post-conference text, Cesare Letta [Letta 2014, pp. 127–141] argues adamantly with the picture of repressive measures taken by Septimius Severus I have presented in the monograph entitled *Septimius Severus et senatores. Septimius Severus' Personal Policy Towards Senators in the Light of Prosopographic Research (193–211 A. D.)* [Окоń, 2012].

The following of my assumptions are the principal points of contention:

- adoption of the list of victims known from *Historia Augusta* as a baseline for my deliberations
- taking into account only those victims which are known by name
- estimation of the number of named persecutees at 54 individuals
- determination of the upper limit of the number of senators at 1000, and estimation of the percentage of the persecuted at 5 %.

As can be seen, the above postulations are crucial for the reconstruction of Severus' policy towards senators and for the assessment of his rule, therefore I have decided to dispute C. Letta in this respect. I sincerely hope that the following elucidations will prove exhaustive and comprehensible to the reader.

#### **Adoption of the list of victims known from *Historia Augusta* as a baseline for deliberations**

In his analyses, Cesare Letta arbitrarily rejected the list of victims cited in Septimius Severus' biography in the *Historia Augusta* (HA) having found it lacks credibility, and based his deliberations on information derived from other historiographic and epigraphical sources. I do not concur with such a conclusion, as in my assessment the list in HA is the most comprehensive surviving list of names of the persecuted individuals and its rejection is not a felicitous method of research. That fact that in part it contains names corroborated by other sources (Herodian, Cassius Dio and epigraphical material) demonstrates that it is not merely a figment of the biographer's imagination. However, a number of researchers, cited by C. Letta, question the authenticity of names which are not confirmed elsewhere; i.e. in accounts other than HA. And yet, does the fact that some of the latter are not *currently* confirmed by any second source warrant their rejection? New studies suggest that one should refrain from arbitrary judgements as to whether a name from

the *HA* list is true or false. For instance, in the volume entitled *Epigrafia e ordine senatorio, 30 anni dopo* (the same in which C. Letta questions the value of the list in *HA*) A. Mastino and A. Ibba advance a hypothesis that the senator Egnatuleius Honoratus, known from *HA* and hitherto considered a fictitious figure, was a son or brother of epigraphically attested procurator Egnatuleius Sabinus from Gightis [Mastino, Ibba 2014, p. 365].

A different situation: it is possible that senator Masticius Fabianus, known from *HA*, was one and the same as the persecuted [Maesius?], father of Maesius Fabius Titianus and Maesia Fabia Titiana c. f., who is known from epigraphical sources [CIL X 7343, CIL X 7276].

The six *Pescenni* mentioned in the list (whose varied *cognomina* are widely held to be fictitious) do give rise to some controversy, but scarcely would any researcher disagree that Severus did away with the families of adversaries in the bid for imperial purple (regardless of the accuracy of *cognomina* contained in *HA*).

Many more examples could be quoted, but the conclusion would be the same — one should not forgo any source, especially one which offers such a wealth of details. Bearing this in mind, I uphold my research premises, finding the *HA* to be an important source in the reconstructions of Severan repressions.

### **Taking into account only those victims of repressions who are known by name**

In the chapter discussing the senators against whom repressive measures were taken, I frequently mention anonymous victims, providing references to source texts which speak of mass convictions, confiscations of estate, banishments. However, I focus my attention on senators known by name (whose tally I provide), especially that anonymous supporters of Niger (and Albinus as well) cited by Herodian and Cassius Dio may be known to us by name from the list in *HA*. Proceeding in this manner, I eliminate the risk of counting the same persons several times.

Taking into account anonymous figures while rejecting the *HA* list (as Letta does) theoretically prevents one from duplicating the same individuals in the calculations, yet it remains an open question whether e. g. 3 legates of Albinus and the 29 persons convicted after Lugdunum are not counted twice. The experience and scholarly intuition of Professor Letta warrant the hope that such miscalculations were not the case in his work.

### **Estimation of the number of named persecutees at 54 individuals (killed, condemned to exile and confiscation of property, or having their career discontinued, in other words marginalized)**

Having adopted *HA* as a basis for the analysis, and excluded anonymous individuals from calculations, I had arrived at an altogether different structure of the victims list than the one recently suggested by C. Letta.

After a thorough analysis, Cesare Letta compiled a list of 56 persecuted individuals (partly anonymous ones). My list includes 49 senators known by name. This means a difference of 7 persons, which is further reduced to 4 once the three counter-emperors are considered (Didius Iulianus, Pescennius Niger, Clodius Albinus). The Reader is due

Table 1

Cesare Letta (2014)	Danuta Okoń (2012)
Killed:	Killed:
M. Didius Iulianus	M. Didius Iulianus, mentioned as emperor, not counted as persecuted senator
Q. Clodius Rufinus	Q. Clodius Rufinus
Iulius Solon	Iulius Solon
Asellius Aemilianus	—
at least 2 senators	mentioned, but excluded from calculations
C. Pescennius Niger	C. Pescennius Niger, mentioned as emperor, not counted as persecuted senator
7 <i>legati</i> of Pescennius Niger	mentioned, but excluded from calculations
Clodius Albinus	Clodius Albinus mentioned as emperor, not counted as persecuted senator
at least 3 <i>legati</i> of Albinus	mentioned, but excluded from calculations
at least 2 senators	—
29 senators condemned to death	mentioned, but excluded from calculations
C. Cingius Severus	C? Cingius Severus
Iulius Laetus	(Iulius?) Laetus
Ti. Claudius Candidus	—
M. Peducaeus Plautius Quintillus	M. Peducaeus Plautius Quintillus
Popilius Peditus Apronianus	Popilius Peditus Apronianus
Baebius Marcellinus	Baebius Marcellinus
Unknown convicted for <i>defectio</i> — CIL VIII 1628, III 427, III 11082	The general mentions concerning <i>defectores</i> do not permit any persons to be identified, therefore they are not included in the calculations
—	Mummius Secundinus
—	Asellius Claudianus
—	Claudius Rufus
—	Vitalius Victor
—	Papius Faustus
—	Aelius Celsus
—	Iulius Rufus
—	Lollius Professus
—	Aurunculeius Cornelianus
—	Antonius Balbus
—	Postumius Severus
—	Sergius Lustralis
—	Fabius Paulinus
—	Nonius Gracchus
—	Masticius Fabianus
—	Casperius Agrippinus
—	Nummius Ceionius Albinus
—	T. Flavius Claudius Sulpicianus
—	Memmius Rufinus
—	Casperius Aemilianus
—	Cocceius Verus
—	C. Iulius Erucius Clarus Vibianus

Cesare Letta (2014)	Danuta Okoń (2012)
Killed:	Killed:
—	Egnatuleius Honoratus
—	Petronius Iunior
—	6 <i>Pescenni</i> (Festus, Veratianus, Aurelianus, Materianus, Iulianus, Albinus)
—	Cerellius Macrinus (Caerellius Marcianus?)
—	Cerellius Faustianus
—	Cerellius Iulianus
—	Herennius Nepos
—	Sulpicius Lu(canus?)
—	Valerius Catullinus
—	L. Novius Rufus
—	Claudius Arabianus
—	Marcus Asellio
—	C. Fulvius Plautianus
—	L. Stilo (unless the same with Iulius Solon)
—	[Maesius?]
<b>In total: 56</b>	<b>In total: 49 (+ 3 counter-emperors)</b>

an explanation — the emperors are not taken into account in my calculations, because policies towards senators and rival contenders for the *purpura* are two distinct issues, but since similar penalties were involved, both groups are often identified as one (which I nevertheless do not do in my book). I did not include the unknown *defectores* either, as they may have been listed in *HA* or may not have been senators at all. Also, I do not consider Ti. Claudius Candidus to be Severus' victim, being unable to verify whether the damage to the former's inscription (removal of the *nomen*) dates to the reign of that emperor. In turn, I will readily accept (after C. Letta) Asellius Aemilianus as a victim of the repressive measures: although he died as the commander of Niger's troops in Asia, there is no doubt it happened on Severus' orders. I am confirmed in this view by renewed analysis of the sources. Thus, my estimation of the number of senators killed would increase to 50 individuals.

However, both lists share the names of 7 senators and, interestingly enough, a similar total of victims. This clearly shows that although different paths were chosen (Letta discarded the *HA* list and included anonymous individuals whereas I accepted the account of *HA* and excluded unnamed persons) a similar result was obtained. Irrespective of the baseline premises, our studies coincide in their results.

Both lists of those who were banished and had their estate confiscated concur with respect to named individuals; however, in contrast to Letta, I did not include the 8 anonymous persons. Incidentally, I would like to stress that the figure certainly seems understated. Source accounts speak of widespread repressions and onerous fiscal measures, it is certain that the estate of all those sentenced to death were subject to forfeiture. After all, one can hardly assume that such envoys of Severus as Q. Hedi Rufus Lollianus Gensianus, *censitor* of Spain and the Gaul, L. Valerius Publicola Messalla Helvidius Thræsea Priscus Minicius Natalis, *legatus ad census* in Belgica, and procurator Claudius Xenophon

Table 2

Cesare Letta (2014)	Danuta Okoń (2012)
Convicted (exile, forfeiture)	Convicted (exile, forfeiture)
P. (or Ti.) Claudius Attalus Paterculianus	P. (or Ti.) Claudius Attalus Paterculianus
Cassius Clemens	Cassius Clemens
at least 8 persons convicted to exile or forfeiture	—
C. Fulvius Plautius Hortensianus	C. Fulvius Plautius Hortensianus
Fulvius Fuscus Granianus	Fulvius Fuscus Granianus
<b>In total: 12</b>	<b>In total: 4</b>

(*procurator ad bona cogenda*) in Africa confiscated the property of only a small group of senators (given the duration of the civil war).

Still, the inability to determine the scale of the phenomenon compels me to confine the list exclusively to persons known by name.

Table 3

Cesare Letta (2014)	Danuta Okoń (2012)
Marginalized	Marginalized
Vespronius Candidus	—
Cassius Dio Cocceianus	—
4 other former supporters of Severus	—
35 senators of the Albinian faction	—
Domitius Florus	Domitius Florus
Iunius Paulinus a.inc.	—
<b>In total: 43</b>	<b>In total: 1</b>

The name which appears in both columns is that of Domitius Florus. Among the remaining 42 individuals in Letta's list there are 39 (4 + 35) anonymous and 3 named figures. A number of reasons dictated why they were not included in my enumerations:

- Vespronius Candidus disappears from the sources in 193, the thesis presuming his marginalization can neither be confirmed nor disproved,
- in the surviving fragments of his history, Cassius Dio mentions his close relationships with the successive emperors and participation in Caracalla's *consilium principis*, which would disagree with presumed marginalization,
- Iunius Paulinus, a consularis known for debauched lifestyle, may indeed have been marginalized but equally well he might have opted for a political "retirement", like many former consuls.

The anonymous, "marginalized" senators (i.e. passed over for promotion) are highly problematic; this applies in particular to the 35 Albinians who according to Cassius Dio were arrested and then released after the battle of Lugdunum. Let us examine the following instances:

- M. Nummius Umbrius Primus Senecio Albinus (cousin of Didius Iulianus), who became an ordinary consul in 206,

- Ti. Claudius Severus Proculus (nephew of senator Claudius Arabianus, condemned to death), who became ordinary consul in 200,
- Antonius Balbus (a relative of senator Antonius Balbus, condemned to death), who became suffect consul around 200–202),
- Flavius Titianus (son of T. Flavius Claudius Sulpicianus, father-in-law to Pertinax) suffect consul under the Severan dynasty.

In my opinion these attest to the fact that Severus did not bear much of a grudge and did grant promotion even to close relatives of the previously persecuted senators. If such was the attitude of the emperor, what are the arguments supporting the notion that, e. g., the 35 senators released after Lugdunum were among the “marginalized”? It is equally likely that Severus, like Caesar and Augustus before him, might have shown his leniency and magnanimity, disregarding the position they had taken during the civil war (not necessarily an active one, after all), especially when later they became actively involved in public life and administration of the Empire.

Recapitulating:

*Table 4*

Categories	Cesare Letta	Danuta Okoń
Killed	56	49 (+ including Asellius Aemilianus) → 50 and (+ 3 counter-emperors)
Condemned to exile, confiscation of estate	12	4
Marginalized	43	1
In total	111	54 (+ including Asellius Aemilianus) → 55 (+ 3 counter-emperors)

As the above demonstrates, the total number of victims according to Letta amounts to 111, while my estimation is 55 individuals — the difference is a substantial one. However, the discrepancy does not arise in the category of the “killed”, but from different results of calculations in the two remaining groups of people subjected to repressive measures. Once again, the disparity is due to the fact that Letta takes anonymous individuals into account and extends presumed “marginalization” to senators in whose case there is no certainty that it actually took place.

In these circumstances, as I am not convinced by the Italian researcher, I stand by my calculations (apart from the aforementioned Asellius Aemilianus), and suggest that they be considered as the minimal (corroborated by the sources) extent of the repressions.

#### **Determination of the upper limit of the number of senators at 1000 and estimation of the percentage of the persecuted at 5 %**

Estimation of the percentage of persecuted individuals with respect to overall number of senators represents a serious problem. In my opinion, the senate at the time was composed of approximately 900–1000 people, therefore the percentage of its members affected by the repressions would amount to 5 %. Letta negated these calculations and found

that the senate did not exceed 600 members at most, hence the percentage of victims of the Severan regime among senators would reach 18.5 %. The considerable disproportion of these estimations has an impact on the assessment of the rule of Septimius Severus and requires more comprehensive explanations and commentaries.

At the outset, it should be noted that the upper limit of the senate's numbers (600 persons) [Alföldy 1977, pp. 17–18, Hopkins 1983, p. 147 ff., Talbert 1984, p. 29 f., Jacques 1987, p. 1287–1303, Chastagnol 1992, p. 110], accepted by a fair number of researchers, is erroneous and does not hold up to verification based on prosopographic data. The percentage computed on such a limit is erroneous as well. Consequently, I feel obliged to advance new suggestions relating to both figures. Arguments in their favour are presented in the following paragraphs.

In the course of my studies on the Severan era, I have compiled an album of senators from that period, which at present comprises about 1,700 names; about 1,200 of those have been dated with certainty to the reign of the Severans. These numbers may seem overestimated, but each case is approached critically and undergoes verification. Recently, due to lack of sufficient justification I was compelled to reject the findings of G. Assorati [Assorati 2014, pp. 449–472] who narrowed the dating of inscriptions: CIL VI 3845 cf. VI p. 3142 et VI p. 3805 = VI 31814 = VI 41169, CIL VI 31799 = 41211, CIL VI 1575 = 41170, IRT 553, BCH 16 (1892) 438, 77 = IGR III 392 = IK 57, 156 to Severan times and concluded that individuals attested therein are senators of the Severan era. Similarly, I was not convinced by the hypothesis advanced by G. Camodeca [Camodeca 2008, p. 53 ff. = AE 2008, 336a], who reads the inscription of Capo la Torre as follows:

[---]O[---]/[--- cu]r(atori) reip(ublicae) Bon[oniensium]/[leg(ato) Aug(usti) pro]v(inciarum) trium Ç[iliciae Isauriae]/ [Lycaonia]e, proco[(n)suli ---]/[---]M[---]EY[---], dating that first mention about the conglomerate of three Minor Asian provinces to the times of the Severans. In my opinion, the *lectio* should be as follows:

[---]O[---]/[--- cu]r(atori) reip(ublicae) Bon[oniensium]/[cur(atori)] v(iarum) trium Ç[lodiae, Cassiae et]/ [Ciminia]e, proco[(n)suli ---]/[---]M[---]EY[---], which corresponds much better with other offices held by the anonymous individual. Thus, there would be no grounds for dating it to Severan times and considering the unidentified official a senator from that period.

My list demonstrates that the senate cannot have had 600 members (as C. Letta would have it), because with one generational change which is universally adopted for the 42 years of Severan rule, the album for that period would contain 1,200 names; in other words we would know almost all senators. No historian of antiquity needs to be told that this is impossible.

It should be stressed that according to *communis opinio* of researchers investigating that period, representative value of the available source material is around 50 % (naturally, this applies exclusively to senators). For the sake of comparison, it may be noted that in the case of officers of equestrian rank, the degree of identification is accessed at 4 % [Devijver 1993, p. 205 ff.], and for the entire order of the equites in the second century at 5 % [Demougin, 1993, p. 240]. The data I have collected is by no means complete (although I would assess its representativeness at more than 50 %), while each successive year of research contributes new, hitherto unknown figures to the list of senators. Thus we arrive at the conclusion that the senate's upper limit of members must have been higher than the aforesaid 600 people.



Over the course of various conference debates, I was being persuaded to acknowledge the limit of 600 members, but I found the arguments raised in its favour to be implausible.

For instance, I am not convinced by the argument asserting quick rotation in the senate — the number of known senators increases in comparison with the Antonine and Flavian periods; consequently, if the senate's upper limit were to remain at 600 members, then a shortening of average lifespan must be presumed! In order for the 1,700 senators attested in the sources to be “squeezed in” the senate with the given limit of 600 members, almost three generational changes would have had to take place ( $1700 \div 600 = \text{approx. } 2.8$ ). However, demographers all agree [Hopkins 1983 and all adherents and opponents quoting his views] that average life expectancy of the senator was 55 years, and average duration of public service was 30 years, therefore even less than two full generations ( $42 \div 30 = 1.4$ ) functioned in the senate under the Severans (even considering that the list of the senatorial order includes boys above infancy age, who, for a large part, grew up and entered the senate, and *clarissimi*, who theoretically did not enter public service or whose service is not accounted for in any sources). These simple calculations coupled with the current state of knowledge reassure me in the conviction that the maximum number of senators must have exceeded the usually adopted 600 persons [Okoń 2015].

The problem can be approached from a different angle: taking the 600 senators whom Septimius Severus inherited in 193, and adding quaestors who entered the senate during the 42 years of Severan rule ( $42 \times 20 = 840$ ), the list of the senate's members would contain 1440 names. If our calculations are based on the senators dated with certainty to the Severan era (that is, approximately 1,200), we would know 83.3 % of them. With a senate composed of 800 people we arrive at a figure of 1640 senators ( $800 + 840$ ) and knowledge of 73.1 % of its members, whereas with 1000 individuals in the senate we would have a total of ( $1000 + 840$ ) — in which case we would know 65.2 %: a reasonable figure and by all accounts an admissible one. Hence my hypothesis suggesting 900–1000 persons as a realistic upper limit of senate's members.

A question arises at this point — how did this limit increase from 600 senators under Augustus to 900–1000 in the Severan period? It is presumed that the actual numbers of the senate were influenced by:

- promotion of young quaestors to the senate
- *adlectiones* to the senate
- average lifespan of senators
- repressions

The assertion that both the limit as well as the number of senators increased, necessitates the assumption that one or more of these factors had changed. It is likely that there were more *adlectiones* ensuring an influx of competent *homines novi*, up to 5–10 individuals a year.

Due to shortage of relevant information in the sources, the scale of *adlectiones* cannot be determined. At present, I assume that almost 250 senators of that period were *homines novi*, some of whom had certainly obtained their *latus clavus* prior to quaestorship, while some were promoted in the course of their equestrian career. Since some bashfully concealed the fact, the number cannot be precisely stated; among 1,700 known senators, senatorial descent is confirmed only for 550 of them. The remainder (over 1000 senators) may equally well have been *homines novi* or members of the old *gentes*. If only a half had

been *homines novi*, the scale of *adlectiones* must have been considerable, contrary to what P. M. M. Leunissen states [Leunissen 1993, p. 88].

Over thirty years (one generation in public service) this would amount to 150–300 *adlecti* and 600 senators, who entered the senate holding quaestorship (20 individuals annually), meaning 750–900 senators, or 1500–1800 for the entire period.

What is more, given the development of economy, growing wealth and advances in medicine, it is to be assumed that life expectancy increased as well [K. Hopkins 1983, p. 148]. Consequently, despite the generational change, there were more and more members of the ‘former line-up’ in the senate. Therefore one has to assume a lower rate of rotation in the senate and reject the minimal indicators suggested in demographic studies, especially considering that we have no information about any serious epidemics that may have afflicted the Empire at the time.

Another factor which contributes to a greater number of senators is the increase in the number of province quaestors resulting from administrative reorganization, among other causes. For instance, if we assume that five additional quaestors were appointed each year, then throughout the rule of the Severans there may have been approximately 200 “additional” *clarissimi viri*. As a result, the maximum number of senators in that period would amount to 2000, while the upper limit in the senate would reach 900–1000 individuals. Concluding the above calculations, it has to be clearly stated that they are intuitive, yet this does not mean that they are erroneous.

The impact of imperial repressions on the senate was negligible, because as I have demonstrated, they concerned only 55 confirmed individuals during the reign of Septimius Severus.

I would also like to address an issue which C. Letta discussed towards the end of his text, namely the so-called “African character” of Septimius’ regime. The Italian researcher assumed that in his choice of associates, Septimius Severus was guided by their expertise and skills while the fact that they originated from his native province (Africa) was less important (than I presume was the case). He also asserted that distinguishing between closer and more distant collaborators, a distinction I draw quite meticulously, harbours the risk of upsetting the perspective.

According to my research, territorial origin of approximately 1700 known senators of the Severan period may be determined in around 1,000 cases; of this number, a little over 20 % originated from Africa. This gave the African members a considerable (though not the foremost) position in the senate, and I concur with C. Letta that it did not differ substantially from the position they occupied in the Antonine era. However, their standing and influence in the Empire did not stem from the share in the senate but from the large numbers of them which were in the immediate circle of Septimius Severus. Among the 38 close associates who held key functions in the imperial administration, 16 (L. Alfenus Senecio, Q. Aurelius Polus Terentianus, Tib. Claudius Candidus, C. Fulvius Plautianus, C. Iunius Faustinus Placidus Postumianus, P. Septimius Geta, Ti. Claudius Claudianus, Claudius (Catulus?) Gallus, Ti. Claudius Subatianus Proculus, C. Iulius Flaccus Aelianus, C. Iulius Septimius Castinus, L. Marius Maximus Perpetuus Aurelianus, L. Marius Perpetuus, L. Naevius Quadratianus, C. Valerius Pudens, Q. Venidius Rufus Marius Maximus L. Calvinianus) — over 40 %, were from Africa. Comparing these percentages (20 and 40 %), I gain a broader perspective and thus cannot agree with the reservations expressed by Professor Letta. It is obvious that the new emperor must have relied on persons he

knew well or those he knew less but who had the recommendation of those he trusted. In such a group, preference was undoubtedly given to former friends from the days of childhood and youth, neighbours and their relatives, therefore I see no reason to challenge the fact that Severus was guided by a perfectly understandable rationale when choosing his close collaborators. It is no accident that his most important commanders (Tib. Claudius Candidus, C. Iunius Faustinus Placidus Postumianus, P. Septimius Geta, Ti. Claudius Claudianus, Claudius (Catulus?) Gallus, C. Iulius Septimius Castinus, L. Marius Maximus Perpetuus Aurelianus) all originated from Africa.

Thus, approaching the issue from in a general perspective (of the entire senate), we may conclude that the position of the African members does not change, whereas a more detailed perspective (collaborators) reveals the considerable significance Severus' compatriots had within his close circle.

I sincerely hope that the elucidations presented here exhaustively substantiate the premises of my research. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the above text is not the final word in the debate concerning the policy Septimius Severus adopted towards the senate. As numerous works devoted to the emperor demonstrate, the subject is a prolific one and may still provide an inexhaustible source of inspiration.

As I greatly appreciate the avant-garde approach of Professor Letta to the issue of repressions under Severus, I do hope that a similarly novel take on the problem of senate's numbers will meet with equal understanding among researchers.

## References

- Alföldy G. *Konsulat und Senatorenstand unter den Antoninen. Prosopographische Untersuchungen zur senatorischen Führungsschicht* [Consulate and Senatorial Order under the Antonines. Prosopographical Research of Senatorial Elite], Bonn, Rudolf Habelt Verlag GmbH., 1977, pp. 430.
- Assorati G. L'adlectio in Senato e l'epigrafia tra metà del I e metà del III sec. d. C. [The Adlectio in Senate and Epigraphy from the middle of the first to the middle of the third century CE]. *Epigrafia e ordine senatorio, 30 anni dopo* [Epigraphy and Senatorial Order, 30 Years Later]. Roma, Edizioni Quasar, 2014, pp. 449–472.
- Camodeca G. *I ceti dirigenti di rango senatorio equestre e decurionale della Campania romana* [The Ruling Classes of Senatorial, Equestrian and Decurial Rank of Campagna Romana]. Napoli, SATURA Editrice, 2008, pp. 418.
- Chastagnol A. *Le Sénat romain à l'époque impériale. Recherches sur la composition de l'Assemblée et le statut de ses membres* [The Roman Senate in Imperial Times. Research on the Assembly's Composition and the Status of its Members]. Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1992, pp. 484.
- Demougin S. Appartenir à l'ordre équestre au II<sup>e</sup> siècle [Equestrian Order Membership in the Second Century]. *Prosopographie und Sozialgeschichte* [Prosopography and Social History]. Ed. by W. Eck. Köln, Böhlau Verlag, 1993, pp. 233–250.
- Devijver H. Veränderungen in der Zusammensetzung der ritterlichen Offiziere von Septimius Severus bis Gallienus [Changes in the Composition of the Equestrian Officers from Septimius Severus to Gallienus]. *Prosopographie und Sozialgeschichte* [Prosopography and Social History]. Ed. by W. Eck. Köln, Böhlau Verlag, 1993, pp. 205–231.
- Hopkins K. *Death and Renewal. Sociological Studies in Roman History*, vol. 2. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 299.
- Jacques F. L'éthique et la statistique. À propos du renouvellement du Sénat romain (I<sup>er</sup>–III<sup>e</sup> siècles de l'Empire) [Ethics and Statistics. About the Renewal of the Roman Senate (from first to third Century of the Empire)]. *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 42<sup>e</sup> année, no. 6, 1987, pp. 1287–1303.
- Letta C. Settimio Severo e il senato [Septimius Severus and the Senate]. *Epigrafia e ordine senatorio, 30 anni dopo* [Epigraphy and Senatorial Order, 30 Years Later]. Eds M. L. Caldelli, G. L. Gregori. Roma, Edizioni Quasar, 2014, pp. 127–141.

- Leunissen P. M. M. *Homines novi* und Ergänzungen des Senats in der hohen Kaiserzeit: Zur Frage nach der Repräsentativität unserer Dokumentation [*Homines Novi* and Additions to the Senate in the High Empire: On the Question of Representativity of our Documentation]. *Prosopographie und Sozialgeschichte* [*Prosopography and Social History*]. Ed. by W. Eck. Köln, Böhlau Verlag, 1993, pp. 81–101.
- Mastino A. and Ibba A. *I senatori africani: aggiornamenti* [African senators: updates]. *Epigrafia e ordine senatorio, 30 anni dopo* [*Epigraphy and Senatorial Order, 30 Years Later*]. Roma, Edizioni Quasar, 2014, pp. 353–386.
- Okoń D. *Septimius Severus et senatores. Septimius Severus' Personal Policy Towards Senators in the Light of Prosopographic Research (193–211 A. D.)*. Szczecin, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego. Szczecin 2012 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2013), pp. 147.
- Okoń D. The Album Senatorium of the Severan Period — Research Problems. *Eos*, 2015, vol. 2, pp. 321–341.
- Talbert R. J. A. *The Senate of Imperial Rome*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 606.

**For citation:** Okoń D. Septimius Severus et senatores once again. A Debate with Cesare Letta. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. History*, 2016, issue 4, pp. 174–185. DOI: 10.21638/11701/spbu02.2016.413

Received: 5 May 2016

Accepted: 2 September 2016